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DEBATE OVER U.S. STRATEGIC A POOR RECORD

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IN BRIEF

Congressman Aspin's assessment, while heralding a welcome Congressional attention to the problems of U.S. strategic forecasting of Soviet weapons developments, does not portray accurately the U.S. intelligence community's past performance in this crucially important arena. His scoring of the eight cases of forecasting selected not only is too generous to the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies, but it also neglects the relative weight of the mistakes committed—particularly in the failure to forecast the formidable build-up of Soviet strategic capabilities in the 1970s. The record of intelligence estimates becomes even more grievous when looked at in the larger compass of the CIA's responsibilities, notably its estimates of Soviet defense expenditures. A ratified SALT II Treaty could not ease the problem; the solution, rather, lies in badly needed improvements in the intelligence interpretation of the ample evidence available.

Congressman Les Aspin has offered an assessment of U.S. intelligence forecasts of Soviet weapons systems development and deployment that says, in effect: We have won some, lost some and tied some. Moreover, he implies that this is about the best one can expect from intelligence forecasting of Soviet weapons technology and deployments.

Congressman Aspin's assessment is welcome on three counts. First, it needs pointing out, as he does, that the U.S. intelligence services have a mixed record in forecasting Soviet weapons development: there have been some overesti-

mates as well as many underestimates. Second, public recognition of some of the intelligence underestimates by a member of the Congressional Select Committees on Intelligence is long overdue. Third, at a time when the Congress and the Executive Branch are negotiating a charter to govern the activities of covert intelligence collection and action, our attention needs to be focused also on the neglected question of how to accomplish improvements in the intelligence analysis and projection of Soviet forces that threaten our survival. We are about a decade late in realizing that the repeated and